Child Sex Abuse Perpetrators among Male University Students

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies indicate that approximately 21% of undergraduate men report attraction to "little children", 4 – 9 % report having fantasies about sex with a child, and 5 – 6% report masturbating to these fantasies. Between 3 and 7% report some likelihood of having sex with a child if there was no chance they would be caught (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Smiljanich & Briere, 1996). Understanding potential for perpetration among young adult men is important for prevention, but research on perpetration in non-convicted samples is limited. We asked 531 undergraduate men about their experiences with abuse as a child, as well as perpetration of child sexual abuse. Approximately **18% report fantasies about child sexual abuse** and 8% have masturbated to these fantasies. **Four percent indicate some likelihood that they would have sex with a child, and just over 2.5% report having perpetrated at least one sexually abusive act against a child.** More students in this survey report fantasies about child sex than in past surveys, perhaps because of the increased availability of child pornography, or differences in willingness to admit such fantasies. The results are discussed in terms of the need for prevention programs that target potential and unrecognized perpetrators.

To Prevent Sex Abuse…

…we need research on sex offenders, not only victims.

Because most abuse is never reported, **we need research on hidden sex offenders** in the community, not only convicted sex offenders.

Past Research

- 21% of undergraduate men report attraction to "little children"
- 4 – 9 % report having fantasies about sex with a child,
- 5 – 6% report masturbating to these fantasies
- Between 3 and 7% report some likelihood of having sex with a child if there was no chance they would be caught (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Smiljanich & Briere, 1996).

Participants

- 531 male Psychology students
- Age M = 19.8, SD = 2.6
- Race/ethnicity
  - White, non-Hispanic 77%
  - Asian 7%
  - Black, non-Hispanic 2%
  - Hispanic 3%
  - Native American 1%
  - Other 10%

Measures

Anonymous survey included

- Perpetration of physical and sexual abuse against children and intimate partners
- Physical and sexual child victimization
- Questions about attraction to sexual abuse of children and adults

Plus these not presented here

- Dissociation
- Social desirability and empathy

Attraction Questions

Similar to Briere & Runtz (1989) and Smiljanich & Briere (1996)

Sample Items

"In the last 12 months,
- how often have you had fantasies about sex with a child?"
- how often have you masturbated during fantasies about sex with a child?"

(Never, 1 time, 2-5 times, 6-20 times, 21-100 times, More than 100 times)

"How likely is it that you would have sex with… if there were no chance that anyone would ever find out?"
- a child
- an adult against his or her will

(5 pt scale, very unlikely … very likely)

"Little children sometimes attract me sexually."

"I am afraid that I need to be institutionalized for protection against my own sexual impulse."

(5 pt scale, completely false…completely true)

Perpetration Measure: Abuse Perpetration Inventory

Lisak et al. (2000)

Sample item:

> Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone, even though they did not want to, because they were too intoxicated (on alcohol or drugs) to resist your sexual advances (e.g., removing their clothes)?

Never, 1 time, 2-5 times, 6-20 times, 21-100 times, More than 100 times

Potential Perpetrators

	% Any N = 531
Perpetrated sexual abuse	2.6
Fantasies last 12 mos.	18
Masturbated to fantasies last 12 mos.	8
Any likelihood of sex with child if no one found out	4
Any likelihood of sex with unwilling adult if no one found out	14
"Little children attract me sexually."	7
"I am afraid I may need to be institutionalized for my sexual impulses"	5

Comparison with Previous Studies

	Briere & Runtz (1989) N = 193	Smiljanich & Briere (1996) N = 99	This study N = 531
Attracted to little children	21% (7 pt scale)	22% (7 pt scale)	7% (5 pt scale)
Child sex fantasies	9%	4%	18% (last 12 mos.)
Masturbated during child sex fantasies	5%	6%	8% (last 12 mos.)
Any likelihood to have sex with child	7%	3%	4%

Implications

Resources for perpetrators and potential perpetrators lag behind those available to victims and potential victims.

Only perpetrators can prevent violence.

Future Directions

Links between early abuse (emotional, physical, sexual) and perpetration.

Prevention and intervention strategies.

Community research with adolescents and older men.

Works Cited

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Thank You

This research has been supported by a grant from the Center for the Study of Women in Society at the University of Oregon and the UO Foundation Fund for Research on Trauma & Oppression. Thanks to Lisa DeMarni-Cromer and the Dynamics Lab.

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